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ABSTRACT

This study of nine Little League teams revolved around the following problems and questions: (a) role or status of Little League baseball as sport or athletics; (b) conflict in the interface of local, provincial, national, and international organizations; (c) relative significance of variables of technical skills, administrative decision-making, and public image; and (d) effect of equating and evaluating amateur sport on the criteria of professional athletics or vice versa. Research procedures included television observation, personal observation teams, interviews, and written questionnaires. Analysis of the interview material and written questionnaires showed commitment to the goals of amateur sport--participation, play, and service in a democratic, mutual-benefit organization for the benefit of players. Observation of actual behavior, however, did not support these beliefs. Aggression, hostility, and other negative behavior was observed on the part of all groups involved. Because of these observations, recommendations were made for changing behavior by modifying the structure of the league. The recommendations included: (a) employing mass media to focus on goals of amateur sports as opposed to goals of professional athletics; (b) dividing players on the basis of age and ability; (c) discontinuing scoring and standing, at least at beginning levels; and (d) evaluating Little League in terms of individual player improvement and number of participants rather than standings, competitive caliber, or success in championships. (PB)

Canada Council, under Grant S72-1768, "Change Agent Research for Citizenship, Sportsmanship and Manhood (CAR for CSM)" provided \$12,000 to Dick Moriarty and the University of Windsor Sports Institute for Research so that a task force team of seventy-five individuals could provide frontier action research for District 5 Little League, Canada's largest franchise. The principal investigators, Dick Moriarty and James Duthie, submit the abstract below on the IDEA format: Identification, Delineation, Evaluation and Action.

Identification

The felt need for this study resulted from a pilot project with the Windsor Sandwich East Little League in the summer of 1972, dealing not only with technical skills, but also decision-making and management of Little League baseball. Following the clinics, behaviour of those involved in Windsor Sandwich East Little League was compared with eight other leagues in Windsor and a significant difference was detected. This difference was evidently obvious to leagues in District 5, for all nine requested consulting service, study and research. The fundamental problems and questions investigated in District 5 Little League were presented by organizational members and revolve around:

- 1) the role or status of sport or athletics
- 2) conflict in the interface of local, provincial, national and international organizations
- 3) relative significance of variables of
 - a) technical skills
 - b) administrative decision-making
 - c) public image
- 4) the effect of equating and evaluating amateur sport on the criteria of professional athletics or vice versa.

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Delineation

Research and development in the past focused fundamentally on clinics on technical skills, psychology of coaching and philosophic treatises. Studies on organizational health were virtually non-existent and therefore SIR/CAR attempted to fill this void by providing macro interdisciplinary study dealing with present and future, combining theory and professional practice. The model employed in the study was the macro model and method developed by Dick Moriarty with a systems analysis technique to allow organizations to identify their ultimate goal, conflict or obstacles preventing achievement of this goal, dissonance between structure and individuals and groups, social stress and constituent strain, ultimate management techniques for short-term, intermediate and long-range readjustment of structure, realignment of personnel with an eye to future change and trends. This is a cyclic model which reverts at this point to ultimate goal.

Evaluation

The sample for this study consisted of selection from the nine leagues in District 5 of three as an experimental group, three as a control group, and one as an ongoing longitudinal study. The research design employed was SIR's innovative Change Agent Research, which combines organizational development and organizational research in a three phase process:

Phase I - Organizational audit and communication feedback

Phase II - Treatment in the form of participative clinics in
order to develop change agents

Phase III - Organizational audit and development of a CAR pak to allow
replication.

The research procedure employed in Phase I and Phase III was SIR's SAW process of Seeing or observing by TV and personal observation teams; Asking or interviewing by the semi-directed focused interview; Written questionnaires and references.

Seventy-five individuals were involved in the task force team, including twenty university and community experts, and five post graduate students who acted as project leaders and fifty undergraduate students who acted as project members. The Seeing or observing project team monitored twenty-five games on a 1/2" portapak TV in the experimental group and collected over 500 slides from teams at large in District 5. The Seeing or observing personal observation team recorded behaviour of 185 teams. One hundred and sixty interviews were conducted on the 3M Model with a cross section of those involved in District 5 (executives, managers and coaches, parents, players, officials, sponsors and fans). A modified Delphi system was employed to develop a Written questionnaire which was distributed to 1,000 parents and players from the experimental, control and longitudinal study group. Data was transferred to IBM cards and analyzed for correlation (Pearson, Spearman and Kendall), as well as being analyzed for significant difference by Statistical Analysis System (SAS), Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) and cross tabulation.

Action

Analysis of the interview material, as well as the written questionnaire, showed the experimental group, control group and longitudinal group strongly committed in terms of avowed goals to true amateur sport (participation, play and service in a democratic, mutual benefit organization for the benefit of the players). After treatment, the experimental group increased its commitment in this direction, while the longitudinal group (after a lapse of eighteen months) showed similar, but weaker, commitment to the amateur sports model. Comparison

of attitudes and beliefs as expressed on the interviews and written questionnaires showed low correlation when compared with behaviour as observed by the personal observation team, as well as the audio-visual team. On the fifty variables observed, the following general results were observed as the season progressed from early in the regular season, to late in the regular season, to tournament:

- 1) a decline in pre-game intra-and inter-team interaction, but an increase of coach interaction with the officials, which correlated at an excellent (.90) level with coach hostility as manifest to umpires, coaches and opposing players (during the game);
- 2) a decline in game and post-game smiles and indifference, and an increase in game and post-game frowns;
- 3) a transfer in player aggression and hostility from teammates and own coach and fans, to self-dissatisfaction and sharply increased hostility towards umpires and opponents;
- 4) a decline in coach positive statements, direction and advice to the bench, with a concomitant decline in player enthusiasm and bench enthusiasm;
- 5) an increase in fan involvement in games as manifest by positive behaviour, such as increased encouragement of own teams and support for own team's good play, but also an increase in negative behaviour such as disparaging own team and opponents' team and a decline in magnanimously applauding opponents' good play.

These trends were particularly prevalent in the younger categories, such as T-ball and Minor. Since this is the initial introduction of most parents and children to Little League, the image is magnified in terms of providing an image of Little League baseball.

Recommendations

In view of the fact that ultimate goals and actual behaviour were not equal in District 5, the alternatives appeared to be:

- 1) change ultimate goal from recreational play or amateur sports to professional athletics, or
- 2) change behaviour by a) modifying structure, or
b) changing individuals and groups.

The SIR/CAR task force project team did not believe that a change in ultimate goals was possible or desired by those involved in District 5. (Only a small percentage, approximately 10%, advocated a highly competitive athletic contest atmosphere.) Similarly, change in individuals and groups did not seem viable or desirable in a voluntary organization, since the attitudes and beliefs of those involved matched the ultimate goal expressed in the constitution and interviews with organizational members. In addition, after treatment, the experimental group increased commitment in this direction, but this had little effect upon behaviour. The SIR/CAR task force team, therefore, saw change in structure as the most viable way to equate the avowed goal and actual behaviour in District 5. On this basis SIR/CAR endorsed the following ten general recommendations which had been advanced by people in District 5 in either participative clinics, on interviews or in written questionnaires:

- 1) Emphasize fun and socialization whenever and wherever possible (since these had ranked above excellence on the written questionnaire and also on audio interviews).
- 2) Conduct clinics on mass media focusing on the social, psychological and organizational goals of amateur sport as opposed to professional athletics.

- 3) Employ mass media to communicate to society the goals of amateur sport rather than develop expectations of professional athletic organizations by posting scores and standings, etc.
- 4) Increase local control, as opposed to Ottawa and Williamsport - decentralize Little League.
- 5) Place more emphasis on league competition, as opposed to district, provincial, national and international tournaments by securing postponement of such tournaments until the season ends or dividing District 5 into participative fun leagues and competitive win tournament leagues.
- 6) Divide players not only on the basis of age, but also ability, psychological and sociological needs. Allow all to play equal time and increase the opportunities for girls' involvement by development of softball and baseball programs. This might be achieved by playing some games during the day, with fewer adults involved, so that youth may develop leadership qualities.
- 7) In T-ball and Minor, no scoring or standing should be kept, mass participation should be promoted and the competitive aspect deemphasized in order to reduce the hostility, conflict and sadness which is currently observed. Discontinuation of scoring, standing, all-star teams and participation in the Rose City and Ancaster world championship tournaments is recommended.

- 8) Improve the dignity and status of umpires by prohibiting and eliminating coaches, managers and parents from questioning calls. In the younger leagues deemphasis of the competitive aspect would allow coaches, managers and parents to act as officials, thereby relieving the better officials for the older age groups.
- 9) The physical setup influences control; therefore in the potentially high conflict situations there should be a separation of players and participants.
- 10) Evaluation of Little League should be on individual player improvement and number of participants, rather than standings, competitive calibre, and success in either league championships or inter-city, provincial and national competition. Even the older age groups should have more emphasis placed on socialization and less on development of excellence, as studies have shown that this is the want and need of the adolescent group.

In addition, District 5 requested that the University of Windsor SIR/CAR continue consultation, study and research with Windsor Little League in order to monitor changes and provide continuing consultation in the early stages of change, which are usually accompanied by high conflict.

On the basis of studies conducted to date by SIR/CAR on Little League Baseball, as well as Windsor Minor Hockey, Chatham Summer Basketball and a number of smaller studies on education sport or athletics, a theory is emerging which sees the organization pass through three stages:

- 1) Stage 1 is a primitive, primary, recreational play era.
- 2) Stage 2 is a stable, amateur sports games era.
- 3) Stage 3 is an elaborate, quasi-professional athletic contest era.

Stage 1 - primary recreational play - focuses on children; Stage 2 - stable amateur sports game - focuses on adults who manage and maintain the organization; and Stage 3 - elaborate, quasi-professional athletic contest era - results in most resources being diverted to adjudicate internal organizational arguments and defend the organization to outer society. The cycle of conflict seems to go from technical problems in the initial stage; to a golden era of revitalization, reorganization and growing achievement; ultimately reaching a peak, after which the organization weakens and experiences increasing difficulties. At this point it either dissolves, or is absorbed into a super organization, or becomes rejuvenated and starts a new cycle. Only longitudinal study on a variety of amateur sport and professional athletic organizations in a number of diverse activities will clarify the emerging theory. There is a particular dearth of studies both within and outside of sport in the area of voluntary mutual benefit or service organizations. In addition, studies are required on professional athletic organizations in order to validate the transfer of theory from other business and commonweal organizations.

Addendum

A satellite project was directed by Miss Marge Holman which applied SIR/CAR and SAW to parents in one of the nine leagues in District 5 Windsor Little League. Little in the way of significant difference was detected in behaviour; however, similar trends to those listed above existed and it is highly likely that a larger sample would show significant difference over the season and in the younger age groups. Perhaps a major finding was that parents are for the most part placid at games, except for a small vocal and negative minority.

Even here, the behaviour of parents in the form of yelling coaching instructions to their team, berating officials and yelling negatively at their own and opponent teams shows a high correlation with such behaviour by coaches and invariably (as shown on TV) follows the coaches' lead. In short, it appears that the tendency of both practitioners and theoreticians to attribute all of the conflict in Little League to parents is not substantiated in reality. Further research into the role and status of parents in Little League and other youth sports organizations is warranted.